

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Merinda Kelly

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Dr Merinda Kelly Personal Statement

BA Visual Arts, B Ed: Art Ed, Master Art & Social Education, PhD Creative Practice: Public art and Performance.

I write with a sense of urgency based on insights materialising through my sustained professional ecology of practice as an artist, creative producer and art educator over several decades.

I grew up in coastal regional Victoria and travelled to Geelong for schooling. From 5 years of age, I wanted to be an artist. Teachers at my primary school didn't support me to create projects I envisioned inspired by art related library books.

My first gallery visit was to the NGV in year 12. It was life changing. I was offered a space in an esteemed visual arts degree in Melbourne at 16. Due to family illness and caring duties, I had to settle for a regional visual art degree. I completed 3 more art degrees and continue my career as a regional artist, creative industry professional and art educator.

It was difficult to live as an artist and carer. I saw inequalities for regional arts practitioners who couldn't afford to attend more prestigious universities in capital cities.

Like so many female artists, I began teaching in art in low SE schools which eventually led me to become the head a dedicated art, design and technology campus and a VCE examiner. In these roles, I brought an artist perspective to the art room to support young people communicate their ideas, meanings and imaginaries every week instead of just a brief encounter, soon forgotten.

My intersecting practices offer insights from a regional perspective:

1. Many art educators are not valued for their exceptional practices and pedagogies. Primary art teachers are essential. Bring back a post-graduate degree in primary art.
2. Nobody values art teachers. They are often female practicing artists who cannot afford to make art for a living as they have to support their families.
3. Being an artist is now being seen as a privileged occupation or one where you can't earn a living.
4. Art educators must be a constant presence in all schools. The art room are the only remaining spaces in schools where students can share their imaginative ideas, meanings and stories with peers and other audiences.
5. We are pathologizing children and art education as therapy. It should be part of life in schools as the first form of human communication.
6. Helicoptering in an artist or activity is fine every now and then, but it is the iterative exposures to quality immersive hands-on experiences curated by the art teacher that are required to truly honor what the arts can bring to student creativity, learning and diverse cultural perspectives and understandings.
7. The GLAM, school and university systems have a deficit view of arts educators in schools. I meet incredibly talented people who have developed artful pedagogical skills that can elicit wonderfully rich
8. Art is a universal language for young people for whom English is a first, second or third language.